

MULTICULTURALISM AND THE CHURCH: PART I

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While in Atlanta for missionary training in the fall of 1996 I had the opportunity to attend a Sunday service at Ebenezer Baptist Church. This was the childhood church of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and where he served as co-pastor with his father as he carried on his civil rights ministry in the 1960s. The day I was there happened to be their Annual Men's Observance and the guest speaker was the 44 year old Benjamin Solomon Carson, M.D., director of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins Hospital. Dr. Carson, who is African American, celebrated diversity in his message. He emphasized the excitement of diversity. In his talk he raised the thought provoking question: how many of us would like to visit the zoo and find that the only animals there were the gazelle or go to the aquarium only to find gold fish. Would you really want to wake up every morning, he asked, if every person you would see looked just like you?

Dr. Carson also stressed the need for Americans to experience a sense of unity. We have all come in many boats to America, he said, but we are in one boat now.

In this article I will highlight the principle of unity with diversity that the Church of Jesus Christ can offer. Coincidentally, in the worship bulletin at Ebenezer that Sunday there was a list of previous speakers for the Men's Observance Sunday and back in 1966 they were honored by a visit from Dr. Benjamin E. Mays who wrote the book, *Seeking to be Christian in Race Relations*, in 1964. I had just finished reading this book

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for my research on multiculturalism and the church.

Dr. Mays' book critiques the subject of race in the life of the Church in the 1960s. Why was there not more diversity in the church? The reason, he says, is because of prejudice. Chapter 5 of Dr. Mays' book is titled, *Race Prejudice – A Wicked Thing*. Here he defines prejudice as "a premature judgment, a bias, usually an unreasoning objection to a person or thing – or a particular race. It means to form an opinion, usually unfavorable, before the examination of the facts."¹ Prejudice, he warns, leads to segregation. He defines segregation as that of being "set apart, to separate from others, to cut off from the main body. Segregation," he says, "may be accomplished either by law or custom. Of the two, legal segregation is the more damaging."²

In the United States racial segregation means the erection of religious, political, economic, and social barriers between one ethnic or racial group and another, making it forever impossible for members of the two groups fully to know, appreciate, and understand each other. It inevitably leads to discrimination, which is a difference in treatment of two or more persons, usually unfair in favor of one side.³

Dr. Mays states that segregation on the basis of color or race is a great sin. When he wrote this book in 1964 there was a heated struggle in the United States to dismantle segregated systems in education, transportation and many other aspects of public life. This struggle also included ending segregation in those churches that still refused persons of other races to join in worship. In chapter 6, *The Church and Race*, Dr. Mays says that "no church can justify on the basis of race the exclusion from its worship of anyone who has a sincere desire to worship God."⁴

1) Benjamin Elijah Mays, *Seeking to be Christian in Race Relations* (New York: Friendship Press, 1964), 45.

2) Ibid., 46.

3) Ibid., 46.

4) Ibid., 46.

When I attended the service at Ebenezer there were some white folks in attendance but when visitors were invited to stand and be recognized I noticed that nearly all the white people stood. Nearly all of the white people in church that Sunday were visitors. We were warmly welcomed and during the altar call everyone, regardless of race and nationality, was invited to join in membership but no white people came forward. I figured that most of the white people were from out of town like myself, but the point is that regardless of the powerful message of Dr. King thirty years ago to integrate our society, Ebenezer Church remains an African American congregation. Why? Why are so many of the churches in the United States still organized along racial and cultural identities?

It is true that today few churches would prohibit persons of other races to join in membership as was the case back in 1964, but race and culture and class are still reasons why many Americans voluntarily separate themselves. This is no longer called legal segregation; it is voluntary segregation, but segregation still the same. We discriminate by choosing to belong to a church with people who look and act just like us.

We may voluntarily segregate ourselves because it is more comfortable to be in a congregation with our own kind. We would never say that people of other races cannot join our church but if many persons of another race joined at an astonishing rate and showed signs of becoming the majority in leadership, we might be alarmed.

As ethnic groups gradually become the majority in white congregations they are called churches "in transition." The attitude of most denominations is that churches have two options, either be "white" or "black"/"ethnic". That experience in changing neighborhoods when the church is "in transition" is rarely considered to be a third option. Why not? Where in the Christian tradition does this desire to be with one's own kind come

from?

Dr. Mays points out that the New Testament does not support segregation and that the early church did not practice discrimination. He says that even in the early existence of the Protestant church race and color did not count but it was when modern Western imperialism began to explore other parts of the world that segregation and discrimination based on color and race was initiated.⁵ He cites a report from the World Council of Churches at Evanston in 1954 from its session on The Church Amid Racial and Ethnic Tensions.

The broad pattern of major racial group tensions which trouble the world today had its historical origins in the period of European overseas exploration and expansion into America, Asia, and Africa. The resulting exploitation of one group by another, involving groups differing race, varied on the three continents. But the same general relations of asserted superiority and inferiority developed between the white world and the colored world. Color became first the symbol and then the accepted characteristic of the intergroup tensions.⁶

In fact, Dr. Mays points out that when churches have gotten together in every world conference since 1928 the practice of segregation has been strongly condemned. The World Council at Evanston in 1954 declared its conviction that "the principle of racial segregation is incompatible with the idea of a Christian society" and with even greater concern the Assembly declared its conviction that "the principle of racial segregation is incompatible with the nature of the Church of Christ in whom the differences of race are already transcended."⁷

If the differences of race is transcended in our relationships because of the teaching of Christ why do we still want to remain apart? "When the

5) Ibid., 61.

6) Ibid., 61.

7) Ibid., 61.

three Methodist bodies merged in 1939 to form The Methodist Church, they followed the pattern of segregation and set up a Central Jurisdiction for Negroes.”⁸ This was the same case for Asians and Native Americans. The Methodist Church was not content with this arrangement and at its General Conference in 1956 recommended “that discrimination or segregation by any method or practice whether by conference structure or otherwise in The Methodist Church be abolished with reasonable speed.”⁹ The Central Jurisdiction was finally eliminated by the end of the 1960s. Now there is African American representation in all levels of the denomination and this is good but most African American United Methodists remain by choice in African American local churches just like before.

An interesting footnote to this discussion were the deliberations going on recently between the denomination and Korean United Methodist churches in the United States who have been giving serious thought to separating themselves into a jurisdictional conference again so they can have more freedom in organizing themselves.

In 1964 Dr. Mays made the statement:

It is still difficult to refute the argument that the church is one of the most highly segregated institutions in the United States. It is often more rigidly segregated than professional baseball, professional boxing, certain labor unions, organized gambling, and the organized illegal liquor traffic. Since the May 17, 1954 decision of the Supreme Court, it can be argued with factual data that secular schools, theaters, and in some cities, hotels and golf courses, have desegregated faster than the local churches.¹⁰

Church leaders, he says, did not have the faith or courage to initiate programs to desegregate society before the Supreme Court decision in

8) Ibid., 66.

9) Ibid., 66.

10) Ibid., 68.

1954 nor afterwards. With the signing of the civil rights bill by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964, Dr. Mays called again on the Church to assume moral leadership and urge the communities to comply. The intention of the law, he said, is to abolish racial segregation and discrimination in voting, education, and public accommodations. Interestingly, the law does not forbid racial segregation and discrimination in the Church of Christ. Because the doctrine of the separation of Church and State is so embedded in the United States Constitution and in the public mind, Dr. Mays thought it would be unlikely that the Congress and the Supreme Court would ever interfere with Church practices in the area of race.¹¹ Dr. Mays made the following conclusion:

The churches will be free to segregate or not to segregate, to accept Negroes and whites to full membership in racially desegregated churches or reject them. The churches did not by example lead in desegregating of society. By and large the churches left the desegregating of society to federal and state courts, the Congress and state legislatures, and to sit-ins and other forms of demonstrations. This is a sad commentary on our churches and the brand of Christianity ministers expound. I know that no sharp line of demarcation can be drawn between the people in the church and the people in the world. They are usually the same people. And yet, we church people do claim that we believe in the teaching of Jesus Christ.¹²

As a child I was taught that the church was supposed to offer moral leadership in society. Ironically, the 1964 civil rights bill gave the churches a new chance to become more Christian by the "secular" actions of the federal government.¹³ The dream of some was that now that society would become more integrated in schools and restaurants, in the parks and pools, buses and theaters, the church would become integrated, too.

11) Ibid., 76.

12) Ibid., 76.

13) Ibid., 78.

However, thirty-four years later churches in the United States are far from being integrated.

There are still horror stories of ethnic minorities visiting white churches and they are coldly received if recognized at all. Why would someone want to join a church where there is not the Spirit of Christ? I can understand why people would want to attend a church with their own kind and be more warmly received. I believe that one of the reasons we have ethnic churches today is because of the lack of hospitality on the part of some white Christians. This lack of hospitality may also be a reality in some ethnic churches, too. Are people of one ethnic group always warmly received by another ethnic group when they visit a church or wish to join? Christians have much work when it comes to race and culture relations.

Dr. Mays concludes his book with the optimism that the leadership of the churches will not allow the churches to become "islands of segregation." The following is his prophecy written in the April 22, 1964 edition of *The Christian Century*:

Negroes will worship in and join white churches. White people will worship and join Negro churches. How many? It doesn't matter! God's people will be free to worship God anywhere they choose. . . . Co-pastors, one Negro and one white, will serve one congregation – even in the South. White ministers will be called to serve predominantly Negro congregations, Negro ministers to serve white congregations – a practice that is followed in some cases today and will become increasingly the case after the false god segregation is dead. In that day Negro and white Christians will worship together, sing together, pray together, share each other's joys and sorrows.¹⁴

Bishop Roy Sano takes a look at diversity in the United Methodist Church from the perspective of the early 1980s in his book, *From Every Nation Without Number: Racial and Ethnic Diversity in United Methodism*

14) Ibid., 79.

(1982). That year I had Dr. Sano as an instructor in United Methodist polity at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley. Dr. Sano was elected to the episcopacy in 1984.

Bishop Sano often cites a 1980 survey which was taken in the United Methodist Church in preparation for this book. One of the findings suggest an interesting contrast between ethnic and white United Methodists. Ethnic minorities favor ethnic minority local churches, ethnically defined structures beyond the local church like caucuses at conference or national levels, and in some cases even conference-like structures as the Korean United Methodist churches have been considering.

White people, on the other hand, tend to look negatively toward distinct arrangements for ethnic minorities. Even ethnic minority local churches are seen by some white people as a necessary concession to human weakness or social evil. Some even think these arrangements are a serious departure from the Christian faith and should be eliminated as soon as possible.¹⁵

Bishop Sano finds this negative response noteworthy because the white constituency represents the overwhelming majority of the denomination. "Hence, the white majority is in a position to decide the fate of an ethnic constituency contrary to their aspirations, or at best to tolerate as a nuisance or embarrassment structures which ethnic minorities are likely to favor."¹⁶

In chapter 3, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Bishop Sano suggests that there may be several things in the consciousness of white people that cause this negative reaction. The idea of *E Pluribus Unum*, meaning "from many there is one" may be one influence. It has been part of America's political

15) Roy Sano, *From Every Nation Without Number: Racial and Ethnic Diversity in United Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdom Press, 1982), 26-27.

16) *Ibid.*, 27.

consciousness from the beginning of nationhood. Not only was there an attempt early on to eliminate differences among the colonies in order to establish greater unity as a nation, but later a civil war was fought over this idea of national unity. According to Bishop Sano, "the dominant emphasis on unity superseding diversity in these moments of national origin and testing has been indelibly written into our consciousness."¹⁷ He concludes that this consciousness has influenced the theology of the United Methodist Church and consequently, our vision of an ideal church and denomination is where unity prevails.¹⁸

The social model of the Melting Pot is another influence. But Bishop Sano understands the Melting Pot theory just as most Americans have and uses sociologist Robert Park's formula (1926) to describe the process. Park stated, "The race relation cycle of contact, competition, accommodation, and eventually assimilation, is apparently progressive and irreversible."¹⁹ This idea is such a classic, Bishop Sano states, that it was detected in the responses of United Methodists in his survey. Apparently many white United Methodists believe that ethnic minorities should lose their distinctiveness and assimilate, in other words, "be like whites."¹⁹

Bishop Sano suggests that "unity with diversity" might be closer to God's intentions. In fact, he believes that Park's sociological dogma does not explain what really happens. He goes further to say that if assimilation is an ideal, it is not even desirable for The United Methodist Church.

Accommodation really happens, says Bishop Sano, but in ways not anticipated by Park. The result of competition between ethnic groups and the white majority has resulted in an accommodation whereby there is a "two-category system." The Kerner Commission in 1969 after the urban

17) Ibid., 28.

18) Ibid., 27.

19) Ibid., 27.

riots of the late 1960s brought this to our attention when it reported: "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white – separate and unequal."²⁰ It appears to be the same with other ethnic groups. Even in the church such disparity is found with ethnic minorities often creating "makeshift parallel religious institutions such as (black colleges, ethnic minority local churches, or subgroups within existing structures, such as ethnic minority caucus movements) which are generally relegated to a lower status, if indeed they are even observed by the dominant religious establishment."²¹

Another type of accommodation which Park did not predict is the development of bicultural or multicultural aspects to people's identities. "The accommodation which Park predicted, also called acculturation, is a process whereby a people with one cultural background adopts the values and behaviors of another people."²² Considerable acculturation has occurred in the United States but there are many people who retain their own language and cultural traditions while appropriating new and different ones.²³ And it is not only ethnic people in the United States who are becoming bicultural and multicultural but white people, too. As all people in the United States experience a greater diversity in their communities, with increased travel abroad and global communications, "the one way process of acculturation suggested by Park accounts for only a very small portion of the extensive interchanges now taking place between ethnic minorities and the white majority."²⁴

There is a cost to accommodation. As people become bicultural or multicultural, there are occasional conflicts as they struggle for ways to

20) Ibid., 31.

21) Ibid., 31-32.

22) Ibid., 32.

23) Ibid., 32.

24) Ibid., 32.

live with a combination of values. Bishop Sano says that ethnic minority persons working in a predominantly white denomination while maintaining ties to their own people have to be socially "ambidextrous" or socially "amphibious." He says that it requires exceptional stamina and ingenuity to retain health and sanity.²⁵ Perhaps this is why such individuals remain exceptions to their communities. Bishop Sano points out that most ethnic people in the United States are not found in mainline denominations that are predominantly white. Why take all the stress?

Grant it, ethnic minority people generally feel more stress because they are a minority in the American society or in a white church denomination, but as our society, work places and churches become more ethnically diverse, I have heard white people express feelings of stress, too. We are becoming a nation of minorities. By the beginning of the twenty-first century the European American population in California is expected to be less than 50 percent and by the middle of the twenty-first century people of color will outnumber whites in the United States.²⁶ These facts should encourage all of us to acquire more skills in being multicultural and not retreat to our ethnic enclaves.

There have been white people in this country who have been insisting on segregation for exactly this reason, less stress. They conclude that it is a lot easier to live with people who are like them, think like them, behave like them, and have the same values as they have. Such people propose having a society where people more or less live, work, play and worship separately.

The civil rights movement made great sacrifices to open the doors to the American society and now that they are opening some ethnic minority

25) Ibid., 34-35.

26) Curtiss Paul DeYoung, *Coming Together: The Bible's Message in an Age of Diversity*, (Valley Forge: Judson Press), 1995.

people are saying they do not want to go through the doors if it means having to relate in a bicultural or in many cases, a multicultural environment. There are some who will deal with the stress of a multicultural society, even a multicultural neighborhood and diverse workplace, but when it comes to church, they do not want the stress.

A colleague of mine who is Korean and serving as the pastor of a Korean Presbyterian church in the Bay Area told me that he believes that ethnic churches provide a necessary "comfort zone." I certainly would agree that the church is in the business of providing comfort to people, especially those who suffer for Christ's sake. I have also observed that for centuries the church has provided a place of comfort for new immigrants who arrived in America with little language or cultural skills to interact successfully with the greater community. Ethnic churches provided resources to these individuals and as long as there remains new streams of immigrants to America these churches will probably continue this ministry.

But I take issue with the assumption that the purpose of the ethnic church is to shield its people from the discomfort produced by a multicultural society. What if the comfort theory were applied to white churches? I would find it repulsive to hear from a white congregation that they would prefer to maintain a predominantly white congregation for the sake of comfort. I know of white churches in neighborhoods that became black where the people refused to accept integration of their church, pleading for this last bastion of comfort.

When I was growing up in the sixties I remember the slogan that "the church should comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." Those who are oppressed by racism in our society or have felt low self-esteem because their language and culture has not been affirmed need to be

comforted by the church and the ethnic church can try to meet the needs of these individuals. But if we choose to belong to an ethnic church as an excuse for not relating to those who suffer just because they are different than us and if we say our mission is only to "our own kind," then we need to hear a prophetic voice.

From 1990 – 97 I served as the pastor of a Filipino American church where the congregation had been offering a place of comfort to new immigrants from the Philippines but were reluctant to serve the needs of other people in the neighborhood of their church. It was apparent that to be in mission to their own kind was far less stressful than to be in mission to people who where of a different culture or race or economic level. It was also less stressful to evangelize their own kind. I would invite people to speak about their feelings on the idea of bringing the diverse people in the neighborhood into membership and this would always raise the stress level. No serious strategy was ever discussed to accommodate folks in the neighborhood. The cost always seemed too high.

I believe Christ calls us to pay the price. People who attend multiethnic churches say that it is not easy. They often miss the comfort that a church might bring when everyone is the same. They may experience racism in a multiethnic church. This ugly monster will continue to exist in the church for the foreseeable future, but Christians cannot use this as an excuse to retreat to their own ethnic enclaves. There are good reasons to have ethnic churches but we must also remember that Christians are in the business of tearing down walls, not erecting them. We are called to celebrate that which brings us together, not those things which keep us apart.

In his book, *Coming Together: the Bible's Message in an Age of Diversity* (1995), Curtiss Paul DeYoung states that the Bible addresses issues of

diversity but not by starting with the differences in the human family. Rather, it begins with the oneness of humanity.²⁷ In the first chapter of Genesis we learn that God made humankind in God's image (v. 26–27). All of humankind can find its oneness in the image of God.²⁸

Throughout the Bible we can see the theme of the oneness of the human family. It is the bedrock of Jesus' ministry according to DeYoung. "The apostle Paul echoed this theme when he told the philosophers in Athens that 'from one ancestor, God made all nations to inhabit the whole earth. . . ' (Act 17:26)".²⁹

While the Bible begins with the unity of humanity, DeYoung points out that the Bible also demonstrates that God values diversity. Even though the Bible is written from the perspective of the ancient Hebrews of Israel, the Diaspora, and Christians, the rich mosaic of people in that region are also acknowledged and often celebrated. In spite of the ethnocentrism that makes its way into the Bible, we find presented in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament the universal message of God's salvation.³⁰

This theme of universality is in the writings of Isaiah: "On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage'" (Isaiah 19:24–25). The prophet reminds Israel that God's love is not only limited to them and emphasizes this fact with words of affection for the other nations: "Egypt my people," "Assyria the work of my hands."³¹

The theme of universality also runs through the New Testament. Pro-

27) Ibid., 1.

28) Ibid., 33.

29) Ibid., 2.

30) Ibid., 2.

31) Ibid., 4.

fessor Cain Hope Felder of Howard University School of Divinity says that Jesus presented “inclusiveness as a matter of divine compulsion.”³² You might say Jesus sums up his position on inclusiveness when he proclaims in a parable: “People will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God” (Luke 13:29, see also Matthew 8:11). Again this theme of universality is celebrated at Pentecost when people from Africa, Asia, Europe and Palestine were gathered together in Jerusalem and miraculously heard the Good News of the Apostles spoken in their own languages.

Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs – in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power. (Acts 2:9–11)³³

DeYoung says that “just as the Babel story in Genesis sought to give an explanation for diversity, Pentecost clarified God’s desire for oneness.”³⁴ The early church struggled with diversity in culture (Jew and Gentile), gender (male and female), and social class (slave and free), but continued to hold the belief that all of our origins came from God and that through the Holy Spirit we could all experience unity with our diversity. DeYoung reminds people of a basic fact:

Faced with fears that push us to separateness, our common ancestry must challenge us to recognize those who seem different from us as sisters and brothers. Even if we want to forget our relatedness, the

God revealed in the Bible does not.³⁵

Although we may be one family, DeYoung says that it is easy to

32) Ibid., 5.

33) Ibid., 5.

34) Ibid., 5.

35) Ibid., 2.

demonstrate that community is a rare experience in society. Even with people who are alike he says that we discover very little real community. Sadly to say, community is also an uncommon experience for people of faith.³⁶

In chapter six DeYoung lifts up some images of what Christian community could be like. He begins by stating that we have not heeded the call of Martin Luther King, Jr. "for a world-wide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, and nation. . . an all-embracing and unconditional love" for all people. "When I speak of love," says King, "I am speaking of that force which all the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life."³⁷ These statements are from Dr. King's book, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* published in 1967. Thirty years later have we in the faith community moved any closer to the dream?

The dream did not start with Martin Luther King, Jr. He was a twentieth century prophet carrying the same message as the biblical prophets who proclaimed "God's love for all humanity."³⁸ DeYoung says that Jesus' ministry was based on this same understanding and that he and his disciples were concerned with "redefining and expanding the notion of community."³⁹ The early church understood community as those persons who had a relationship with the resurrected Lord regardless of race or culture. The twentieth century German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, stated "Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ."⁴⁰

36) Ibid., 153.

37) Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 190.

38) DeYoung, *Coming Together*, 156.

39) Ibid., 156.

40) Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), 21.

The community finds its identity more in Jesus Christ than in each person's respective culture. In fact, I believe Christ calls us to transcend those identities that this world gives us. Christians through the ages have referred to their community as the "church" (ekklesia), which means those who are "called out." DeYoung says that "the essence of the image of the church was that when the people of God assembled together, they were no longer defined by the standards of society; they became a people called out of the world by God."⁴¹ This is why the Apostle Paul says of Christians in Galatians 3:28: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

This does not mean we no longer have a cultural identity, but that we do not allow our culture or race or class to separate us from being in community with fellow Christians or from all humanity. In Matthew 10:37 Jesus says "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." This implies that we do not put our relationship to our family or to our nation, culture, race or class before our relationship to Jesus Christ. We can affirm these aspects of our identity but should never turn them into an idol.

Jesus led a counter culture movement. In the late sixties and early seventies in America there was a counter culture movement that sought alternative ways of living. This movement gave me tools to critique my society and culture. These were formative years for me and I can see now how this social phenomenon shaped my understanding of Christianity. I have always remained critical of the American culture, especially in the ways it has negatively influenced Christianity. When people say that they

41) DeYoung, *Coming Together*, 157.

want to acculturate Christianity I only have to look at the Church in America to see some of the negative influences acculturation has had on the Church; the influence of capitalism, for example. Just as the Church should be wary of the American brand of Christianity it should also be careful not to buy into other cultures lock, stock and barrel.

It is popular to affirm everyone's culture today, but we must still identify where the powers of evil are lodged in each culture and name them. For example, male chauvinism is a characteristic found in many cultures throughout the world including the culture from which the Bible came. Many people today would attest to the pain that male chauvinism has brought to humankind. I would suggest that Christianity not embrace this aspect of culture as it continues to do in many parts of the world. For example, there are women who are refused to be ordained in some churches because their churches, influenced by their respective cultures, embrace male chauvinism.

Similar to the idea of the counter culture DeYoung uses the image of a "contrast community." He believes that God set the Hebrew people free from slavery in Egypt for the purpose of creating a community that would be an alternative, a contrast, to the other nations around them. For example, the concept of a "jubilee year" was a radical idea. It placed just relationships at the core of Israel's community. The Hebrew people were to be a contrast community by emphasizing justice, liberation, equality and human dignity as organizing principles in their daily living and refuse to assimilate to the ways of governing found in Pharaoh's court or among the nations in Palestine.⁴²

DeYoung suggests that this contrast community was never implemented. The concept came into being during the charismatic leadership

42) Ibid., 160.

of Moses in the wilderness but after his death “when Joshua led the Hebrew people into the ‘Promised Land’ of their new communal home, the children of Israel certainly did not model this sense of justice when relating to their new neighbors.”⁴³ DeYoung predicts that if this contrast community had actually happened, “it would have revolutionized biblical – indeed, world history.”⁴⁴

Because this image of community was never actualized, God sent Jesus to incarnate the jubilee spirit of the contrast community. Jesus called his followers to reorder their relationships. DeYoung uses the biblical image of the household of God to convey these new ways of understanding relationships. One of the organizing principles begun in the concept of a contrast community but found difficulty finding fruition, is the ability to organize in non oppressive ways. Jesus calls his followers to live by this principle. The apostle Paul captured the essence of the household when he wrote:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God. (Ephesians 2 : 19–22)⁴⁵

43) Ibid., 160.

44) Ibid., 160.

45) Ibid., 161.